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ABSTRACT

The increase in labor force participation of women, and particularly of mothers from two-parent families, has been accompanied by significant changes in family structures. Although the traditional family is no longer the norm, many social perspectives and policies reflect the belief that it is and do not meet the needs of dual-employed families. Dual-employed couples experience problems of work and role overload, identity and normative stressors stemming from traditional sex-role stereotypes, and difficulties in coordinating daily schedules. Societal changes which would increase the quantity and quality of all kinds of services (educational, domestic, child care, etc.) would strengthen dual-employed family living. Institutional changes which would increase the flexibility of the occupational structure would also aid significantly in reducing stress in dual-employed families. Flexible scheduling, increased availability of part-time employment, on-site day care, and parental leaves are some of the occupational changes which would enable individuals to combine work and family roles with less strain. Social changes which would benefit dual-employed families involve a re-evaluation of the traditional career path model, nondiscriminatory employment opportunities, comparable worth legislation, and a change in marriage tax laws. (NRB)

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Managing In Dual-Employed Families: Policies and Perspectives That Would Help

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Managing In Dual-Employed Families: Policies
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In what has been identified by some as one of the most significant social changes of the twentieth century, the growth in the labor force participation of women has indeed been dramatic and has been accompanied by significant changes in family structure. Statistics on the incidence of working women continue to indicate an increasing involvement and attachment to the work force by women---women who also have major family responsibilities. In fully 62 percent of all married couples with earnings in 1981, both the husband and wife were employed. But the most dramatic change in labor force participation has been among mothers in two-parent families. Between 1960 and 1980 this category of female workers nearly doubled with nearly one out of every two married women with pre-school and school-age children employed outside the home. In addition, almost two-thirds of women with children between six and seventeen were working in 1981. Furthermore, current trends suggest the likelihood of increasing full-time, year-round involvement in the work force by all women. While the pace of this labor force participation may slow down in this and the next decade it is indeed realistic to acknowledge that women are in the labor force to stay and that in all likelihood they will continue to combine employment and family responsibilities. What these trends emphasize is the emergence of the dual-employed family as a prominent family lifestyle in the decades ahead.

However, active acceptance and support of these trends by our society as ones that affect the lives of so many of our population still lags far behind the statistics. Most of our formal and informal institutions are organized around a belief system of a society dominated by the traditional family with

a husband-father who is the sole provider and a wife-mother who maintains the home and cares for the children. Although the traditional family is no longer the norm in our culture, many social perspectives and policies in both the public and private sectors reflect the belief system that it is and, subsequently, do not meet the needs (and in several instances impede the functioning) of dual-employed families. Consequently, contemporary dual-employed families tend to cope single-handedly with most of the adjustments required to manage their lifestyle, taking an ad hoc approach to the solution of the problems which they confront.

The purpose of this paper is to delineate the strains experienced by dual-employed families which occur, in part, because of outmoded social policies and perspectives. Recommendations for policy which would provide greater support for this family lifestyle are offered.

Dual-Employed Family Stressors

The problem of work and role overload is a common source of strain for dual-employed families. When each individual is engaged in an active work role and active family roles, the total volume of activities is considerably increased over what a conventional family experiences. In dual-employed families this can result in overload, with household tasks generally handled as overtime.

Identity and normative stressors stemming from traditional sex-role socialization and stereotyping, which suggest that men "should" be occupationally successful. powerful, in command, etc. and that women "should" be skilled in cooking and other domestic activities, nurturing, passive, and deferring to men. Such internalized values from early socialization often create ambivalence, guilt, self-doubt and tension for dual-employed couples attempting more egalitarian roles.

The stress of role-cycling experienced in some dual-employed families refers to their attempts to mesh the demands of their individual employment cycles with

the changing responsibility of the different family life cycle stages. Generally, the most stressful times occupationally are when the individual is establishing himself or herself on the job and again when one is promoted or assumes new or added responsibilities. Similarly, various time periods in the family, such as the childbearing stage and adolescence of the children have been noted to be particularly stressful. Some dual-career couples attempt to avoid additional strain by staggering their career and family cycles so that peak career and family stress times are not occurring simultaneously. But, overall, any flexibility must come from the family rather than the work arena.

The complexity of coordinating daily schedules is also a concern of most dual-employed family members. Because they are meshing two daily occupational schedules with individual family members' schedules, dual-employed couples are very conscious of how they spend their time. Jobs which give the individual flexibility in controlling his or her schedule are highly valued in such families, as it makes it much easier to meet family obligations, such as getting the children to their dental appointments.

There are many aspects of the occupational milieu which make it difficult for the dual-employed. As Holmstrom (1973, p. 29) pointedly noted: "The trouble with having a profession today is that if you have one, you are expected to pursue it in a certain way--and it is a very rigid way." First of all, there are stringent expectations as to how a career is to be pursued. The demand for single-minded continuous commitment required by most careers is a potential stressor for many families and particularly for dual-career families. Such an orientation may assume that other family members' needs will be subordinated to the career and that a "support person" (typically the wife) will be available for entertaining, managing the home, and caring for children. It also often means that an "interrupted" career pattern characterized by part-time employment will be judged less

favorably when it comes to hiring and promotions.

The demands for occupational mobility and immobility presents another barrier for dual-employed families (Holmstrom, 1973). Some jobs require moves by the individual in order to retain the position or to be promoted. Although there are increasing numbers of high-ranking employees who are refusing job transfers, career development is still generally enhanced if one is able to be mobile.

The opposite of mobility is important also. Sometimes it is necessary to stay put in a certain location long enough to finish an education or establish oneself in a specific profession. It is to the individual's advantage to be able to do this without having to consider the occupational needs of other family members.

Obviously, in the dual-career family, the situation is more complex. Dual-career couples report that their spouse's career influences their decision about where to live in varying degrees. In Holmstrom's study (1973) of two-career couples, every wife reported that her decision about where to live was significantly influenced by her husband. Often the couples negotiated simultaneously for a set of positions and sometimes the wife followed the husband. In some instances, the wife wanted to move but was restricted to one place because her husband could not, or would not, move. In the majority of couples, the husband's decision about where to live was, also, significantly influenced by his wife's career. In such instances, the couples negotiated for a set of positions, considering the needs of both partners, and for a few couples, the husband followed the wife.

The rigidity of the occupational structure, then, serves as a major barrier for dual-employed couples. A few dual-employed couples are, in an ad hoc manner, negotiating work arrangements which will reduce or remove some of this stress.

Informal attempts at flexible scheduling, job sharing, and split-location employment are utilized by dual-employed couples lucky enough to have employers who allow for flexible work policies. However, such policies, which help support and sustain the dual-employed lifestyle, are not widespread.

Workplace Policies and Practices

The most overwhelmingly supported recommendation to come out of the 1980 White House Conference on Families was a call for family-oriented personnel policies. Certainly, as Kanter (1977) noted in her review of work and family in the United States, there is a need for the family to "fight back" letting employers know of its needs, and we are beginning to see this happen. Kammerman's study (1982) suggests two major areas in which employers care and do respond to the family responsibilities of employees: 1) the benefits and services provided employees by their employers; and 2) the scheduling and hours of work.

Personal leaves and sabbaticals. The option of personal leaves-sabbaticals would be a valuable benefit to most dual-employed family members. There are numerous situations in which career flexibility and the possibility for brief interruptions in the employment cycle could aid personal and family life.

Parental leaves. Maternity and paternity leaves are among the more obvious types of leaves needed, yet the U.S. lags far behind most industrialized nations in providing extensive parental leave programs. The United States has no statutory provision that guarantees a woman the right to a leave from her employment for a period of time, protects her job while she is on leave, and provides compensation while she is not working due to pregnancy and childbirth (Kammerman, 1980). While unpaid maternity leave has become a fairly general benefit in most corporations, the length of time allowed is limited and the more important benefit, with leave with pay, is rare. Accommodations of employers to fathers and their childrearing

responsibilities reflect prevailing sex-role norms in that only about a fourth of the leading corporations in the country offer paternity leaves. The extent of parental leave options in the work arena is best summed up by Kammerman (1982) who noted that "....policies have undoubtedly been liberalized in the last decade or so, but employer accommodation to childbearing is still very far from being a worker's right" (p. 168).

Added vacation time. Traditional practice among American businesses, in contrast to European practice, is a very brief vacation. In large and medium-size businesses, a paid vacation is standard practice for fulltime workers yet many employees in small firms do not have paid vacations. However, more than 40% of the workers surveyed by Best (1980) reported that they would give up some current income for added vacation time. Women workers, workers in dual-earner families and workers with young children were particularly desirous of this option. Whether to briefly escape the often frenzied pace of combining family and employment roles, or to be able to extend the time spent with their children, added vacation time would be a helpful benefit to many workers.

On-work-site day care is a policy recommendation frequently mentioned as advantageous to working parents. With their children nearby parents may more easily have contact with them during the work day to check their progress or respond quickly to an emergency. On-site day care is less expensive for parents and more convenient than individual family arrangements. However, child-care services at job sites have been rare with the explanation being that there has been no economic incentive to employers to provide such services. The 1981 federal tax legislation (Economics Recovery Tax Act) providing a new dependent-care assistance benefit and allowing employers a range of options in sponsoring child-care services for employees as a tax-free benefit may provide the incentive needed here (Kammerman, 1982).

Flexible Benefit Plans. The current private benefits system that is available to fulltime workers is designed as if each employee were a part of a one-worker family with a spouse and children at home. Conventional employee benefits systems also appear to be based on the assumption that employees all have similar needs which remain the same through all the stages of the life cycle (Kammerman, 1982). A cafeteria system which would allow employees to choose from a variety of benefits would appear to better accommodate the varying needs of individuals and families. Very few firms presently offer such a flexible system but if this option grows among businesses, it will offer research possibilities for determining more accurately what employees with family responsibilities really want in the way of job-related services and benefits.

Flexitime. About 7.6 million workers, or 12 percent of all those in fulltime nonwage and salary jobs in 1980 were on flexitime schedules. Flexitime scheduling allows employees daily variation in arrival and departure times although the total weekly (or monthly) hours remain the same. The advantages to dual-working parents seem obvious. Parents can better mesh their employment schedule with that of their child's school day or child-care arrangement. In general, flexitime provides all workers with greater control in scheduling their day as well as providing some direct benefits for employers (e.g., reduced tardiness, absenteeism, sick leave).

Job-sharing. Job sharing isn't merely part-time work. Rather, it is an intelligent alternative for people who desire employment, family responsibilities, community involvement, etc. Job sharing may be defined as an arrangement whereby two employees hold a position together, sharing the pay, vacation, sick leave, and other benefits between them, and maintain the same prestige and status as full-time employees. Research indicates that teachers have taken the lead in job-sharing with some interest also evident among nonmanagerial, white-collar

office jobs, and workers in the helping professions. The overwhelming number of job sharers are women reflecting an attempt on their part to cope with the overload strain of dual-employed family living--a strain that is experienced most acutely by women.

Permanent part-time work. A policy supporting permanent part-time work could be quite attractive to dual-employed families who are willing to trade some income for more time at home. The appeal of this option rests in an expanded definition of part-time work emphasizing its permanence and connoting a career-relatedness to the position with the potential for upward mobility (Cohen and Gadon, 1978). This definition has not typically been associated with part-time work in the past. A limited number of surveys show that a sizeable number of full-time workers in career-oriented positions would like the option of permanent part-time work but there is little evidence thus far to suggest that the employers have been responsive to this option.

Relocation policies. The practice of transferring executives from location to location in order to meet the needs of a company has historically created strain for families in general. However, the rising number of dual-career couples (the type of dual-employed family for whom this issue is most relevant) is beginning to force a reevaluation of "executive transfer". A recent Catalyst survey (1980) of employers revealed that fewer than one in five had formal policies providing for assistance to relocated spouses. Many of these companies did indicate, however, that they provided informal assistance. This may not be enough help for dual-career couples who, according to the Catalyst survey, were far more concerned about relocation/transfer policies than their employers knew. Such couples reported not feeling free to ask for informal relocation counseling for family members until it has been presented as a formal company policy.

The transfer policy (or "move up or move over" policy) is just one of many traditional corporate practices that is not sensitive to the needs of contemporary families. Hopefully, companies will increasingly recognize (or will be pressured to recognize) the value of more family-oriented policies for all of their employees.

Community Support Systems

Child care. Almost 80 percent of the delegates to the White House Conference on Families recommended that our nation more actively promote and support a variety of child care choices -- home, community, and center-based care. Indeed, child care concerns are a high priority for dual-earner families. Child care needs of working parents are particularly acute in the areas of a)good infant care, b) summer holiday and vacation care, and c) care of sick children.

The current day care picture in the United States, however, consists of fragments of service scattered over the national landscapes (Feinstein, 1984). While the debate over a national day care policy extends beyond the limits of this paper, it is accurate to note that in nations where no day care system exists, employed parents experience more difficulties, in providing for their children during work hours. Some writers (Woolsey, 1977) have suggested that contemporary working parents are receiving the type of child care they prefer in the informal, in-home care arrangements (which account for 75% of all children in need of such care). Other scholars have noted a pressing need for more day care options, acknowledging that one national system of care is less desirable than federal support for a variety of public and private alternatives. Regardless, the general picture of day care services available to families in the United States can be characterised as increasing in need and concurrently decreasing in availability (Dail, 1982).

Kammerman & Kahn's (1979) proposal of a child care benefit service package provides a useful model of publicly subsidized child care services that could be

a valuable support system for working parents. Their proposal includes child care service:

> -Provided as a separate program or under the aegis of the public education authorities, or perhaps (for children under two or two-and one-half and for family day care) social service authorities
>
> -With priorities set (until there is sufficient provision) so as to favor the children of working parents (one-parent or two-parent families) and children with other special needs
>
> -Free as in elementary school, or with subsidized but income-related fees, varying with country practice
>
> -Covering the normal work day, but with some children staying shorter periods of time as needed and preferred
>
> -With some options among sibling and age-segregated groups and with whatever are the prevailing options for group size and staffing patterns and qualifications
>
> -Including support of licensed, trained, and supervised family day care programs, in which the family day care mothers receive wages and fringe benefits comparable to similar staff in center or group programs, to serve some children from about the age of six months to two to two-and-one-half years, and older children with special needs. Here, parental preferences still vary. Moreover, time and resource constraints may require the use of family day care until sufficient space is available to group facilities. Thus, the principle would be to ensure good quality family day care for those who use it out of preference or because of temporary expediency. Or, if the costs can be met and it is preferred, it could remain within the programming repertoire, better integrated with group programs. Indeed, it is quite likely that some family day care will always be needed, whatever the cost, not so much for the parents who prefer the informality, flexibility, intimacy, and intensity of a one to one relationship (since if the quality is high it would be an extremely expensive form of care) but for children with special needs (pp. 340-341).

While a system like this would not be the choice of many working parents, it would reflect a changing governmental attitude of attempting to ensure good care for children when they are cared for outside the home, not currently reflected in United States policy.

Community supports for employed women. Kanter (1977) proposed this idea as an effective way for married employed women with children to cope with their multiple involvements and as particularly necessary "...for single parents without familial supports and for working women whose husbands fail to give it

to them" (p. 96). Community supports would range from community-sponsored support groups for women to private business attitudes which would facilitate the development of policies conducive to their needs. If the schools, the church, neighborhood associations, and other relevant social institutions which have relied for generations on the volunteer help they get from women would actively accommodate, through flexible scheduling of programs and services the multiple roles of women and would more actively recruit the aid of fathers, they might reduce the "lack-of-participation-due-to-employment" that some community groups report. For while employed women may complain of the overload they experience and realize that the "superwoman approach" to juggling multiple roles is not particularly constructive, few are ready to give up some of the volunteer service they provide particularly when it is of direct benefit to their children. They only ask for flexibility in providing that service. Community programs must be more responsive to the needs of the contemporary woman as they offer meaningful support and request assistance.

Marketplace goods and services which stress quality and provide flexibility supply important day-to-day support for dual-employed families for whom a lack of time is frequently a concern. The traditional 8 to 5 work hours provided by some professional services make it difficult for dual-employed workers to meet the needs that various family members may have for these services. Fortunately, competition and the free enterprice system has taken care of this problem in many areas, yet it still remains a problematic issue for many dual-employed families.

Social/Attitudinal Changes

Re-evaluation of the traditional career path model. As noted earlier, some of the stress experienced by dual-employed family members is the result of conventional expectations of how a career, in the strictest sense, is to be pursued.

The conventional orientation of work ethic career success follows the mentality that the harder one works, the greater the dedications to the job, the more likely one would be recognized and rewarded with advancements and promotions (Sullivan, 1981). Unfortunately, along with other drawbacks, the advancements and increased responsibility leave even less time for family activities and consideration of a spouse's career.

Bailyn (1979) has suggested alternative models which may be more viable for combination of career and family development. One example of this is the apprenticeship model which has relatively protracted periods of study and training during the early stages of career development and moves at a slower pace than the traditional career path. This type of career path option would have many advantages for both men and women who want to mesh home and employment responsibilities devoting quality time to each.

Employment discrimination. Any discussion of policies helpful to dual-employed families must reaffirm the continued need for nondiscrimination, affirmative action, and equal employment opportunity practices in the workplace. A renewed emphasis at the federal level is critically needed at the present time in support of these policies. Likewise, more rigorous enforcement of penalties for noncompliance or token compliance to the laws and orders established to affect employment discrimination is necessary. Two decades of efforts since the passage of legislation such as the Equal Pay Act (1963) and Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 has not begun to eliminate the earnings gap between men and women. Thus, advocates for nondiscriminatory employment opportunities are looking at such concepts as comparable worth as a possible remedy to the existing inequities.

Comparable worth legislation. Comparable worth as a policy issue rests on the premise that the marketplace has historically discriminated in jobs held

predominately by women by establishing lower rates of compensation. Because any job has a certain inherent "worth" to the employer and society at large it seems possible to compare these worths, even though they may not require the same exact skill, effort, responsibilities, and working conditions. In a report commissioned by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (1978) three basic conclusions reached were: 1) that the value of the work done and factors such as education, experience and skill that a worker brings to a job does not explain all, or even most of the earnings gaps; 2) past discriminatory practices have been incorporated into the wage structures and these still continue to exist; and, 3) within the firms that use job evaluation plans as an aid in setting wages, women's jobs are paid less on the average than men's jobs with the same rating. When the term discrimination was used in this study it did not imply the intent to be unfair, but refers only to outcomes.

Policy studies and legislative consideration of bills ordering job evaluation studies are currently being considered in some seven states. It is a meager beginning but the acknowledgement and implementation of the concept of comparable worth would be an important breakthrough in sexual equity which would, in turn, help dual-employed families.

Marriage penalty tax. Contrary to what many believe, the new marriage tax (a part of the Economic Recovery Tax Act passed by Congress in 1981) which took effect in 1982 did not equalize federal tax rates for married and single taxpayers. It does create an exemption of 10 percent of the income of the "lower earning spouse" and eligible taxpayers also get an additional break when their state adopts federal tax deductions. However, it does not resolve the inequity in terms of taxes paid when a married pair is compared to a cohabiting couple with comparable earnings, and, thus, reflects a policy which continues to negatively impact marriage and family.

Family impact analysis. An interest in the impact of policies on families appears to be growing and the political competition this election year over who is "pro-family" is encouraging. However, this optimistic perspective must be tempered with the reality that a concern for family well-being still has little impact on national decisions. A renewed effort is necessary to set up a system forcing legislators to discuss and debate the possible consequences of a given policy on the family.

In a similar vein, Kanter (1977) proposed the idea of requiring employers to file "family responsibility statements" summarizing their major organizational policies and how they might affect workers and their families. Filed in the same way as an affirmative action plan, a "family responsibility" document might encourage businesses to take some responsibility for their effects on families and personal relations.

Conclusion

As roles and responsibilities of family members change, so must the services and support provided by various social institutions change. Employers will be increasingly called upon to provide benefits that will assist employees in meeting their work and family responsibilities. Public and private community institutions such as schools, churches, leisure and human services centers, as well as the marketplace, must also adapt to the changing needs of families (Kammerman, 1982).

The role of family practitioners in facilitation of these changes in various arenas seems evident. Each family life professional has the opportunity to serve as a spokesperson for societal and institutional changes which would positively affect the functioning of dual-employed families. Societal changes which would increase the quantity and quality of all kinds of services (educational, domestic, child-care, etc.) would strengthen dual-employed family living. Institutional

changes which would increase the flexibility of the occupational structure would also aid significantly in reducing or eliminating some of the stress associated with the lifestyle. Flexible scheduling, increased availability of part-time employment, on-site day care facilities and maternity and paternity leaves are some of the occupational changes advocated to enable individuals to combine work and family roles with less strain. Assuming an advocacy role on behalf of the dual-employed lifestyle involves initiating and supporting social policies which promote equity and pluralism (Rapoport & Rapoport, 1976). A society where these values prevail would enhance not only the dual-employed lifestyle, but would serve to strengthen family life in general.

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